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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the realities of present-day community colleges with the assumptions generally made about them a decade ago, and concludes that the profile of the community college of 1968 no longer fits the institution of today. The concepts of comprehensiveness and accessibility laid out in the original state plans are now being questioned on financial grounds, the increased proportion of state financial support has not offset inflation, and state functions in coordination and establishing standards have expanded to the regulation of almost every facet of college operation. Financial constraints have caused some colleges to restrict enrollments, to raise tuition equal to that of public universities, and to halt growth in technical and semi-professional programs. Under the guise of "improving academic standards" the open door is slamming shut across the nation; services to aid the under-educated are being curtailed or discontinued. Although community colleges are represented in state higher education councils, they are viewed unsympathetically as consumers of scarce resources rightly belonging to traditional institutions serving "regular" students. Local authority and control are eroding. The commitment of the community colleges to the ideals that brought them into being is tending to fade; unless they can sustain their own sense of direction they will lose their integrity in a morass of statewide planning and institutional homogeneity. (JDS)

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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION AT THE START OF ITS FOURTH QUARTER CENTURY

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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE
EDUCATION AT THE START OF ITS FOURTH QUARTER CENTURY

Evolution of the Community College

The community college was born three quarters of a century ago as a pragmatic response to a real need. Education was the birthright of the American people vouchsafed by that Renaissance man of our nation's forming, Thomas Jefferson, who had stated more than one hundred years before Joliet Junior College that no nation could become strong with an uneducated citizenry. Thus educational aspirations became a primeval thread woven into the roots of our society.

As each level of education became accessible, the aspirations of parents and their children were quickly raised to the next plateau. When eight years of grammar school became a reality, parents almost immediately clamored for high schools to be provided. And with high schools scarcely in place, parents demanded why their children could not pursue the first two years of post-high school work while continuing to live at home.

They had willingly assumed the burden of supporting their high schools. Who was to deny their request? By the 1890's young men and women who had completed one or two years of post-high school studies in their local high schools were presenting themselves for admission to the great universities of our land, both public and private. Given their commitment to promoting an educated citizenry and the quality of scholarship of the applicants, there was no basis upon which to deny admission with advanced standing. Soon the universities were admitting students to advanced standing as a matter of course and as the numbers became sufficiently large to demand recognition, State Legislatures initiated legislation to legitimatize this new phenomenon.

In due course, the aspirations of it constituents generated the demand that post-secondary programs be expanded to meet additional needs and serve

additional types of students. Eventually, as we know, the comprehensive community college as it exists today came into being - again as a conditioned response to real or perceived needs.

Though great debates were held on the university campuses concerning the nature and nurture of the new two-year post secondary segment of higher education, those responsible for the management of this segment were too preoccupied with the problems of day-to-day survival to be able to devote time to philosophizing about the future of their institutions. Instead, when there was time for thought and discussion concerning the new two-year college, the focus of such thought and discussion was upon an attempt to create a rationale for what had happened - after the fact! This pattern of development has persisted to the present time.

Only infrequently have community college leaders taken the time - as we are doing here - to put aside practical matters in order to address philosophical issues relating to our institutions. Even today there is great temptation to discuss such practical issues as how much state direction can be endured before local autonomy is totally eroded; why authority for approval of courses designed to meet local needs must be vested in a bureaucracy which has virtually no contact with the students who are to be served by the course; or what is an appropriate level of state support for the operation of a locally governed community college?

It is important that community college leaders take the time and create the opportunity to become engaged in the type of activity in which we are involved here today. Karl Jacobs and Dick Erzen are to be commended for developing the concept of this workshop and enlisting the support of the Council of Presidents for its conduct.

Comparison of Objectives and Outcomes

It was suggested that we should, in preparing our papers, "detach ourselves

from an institutional setting and view the community college from the bridge." It was suggested further that we "deal with certain assumptions and test them against performance." And, finally it was indicated that we were to speculate about the future of community colleges as institutions which have moved from developing to ongoing enterprises.

As I reviewed the available literature concerning the community college, it occurred to me that it would be interesting to test the performance of community colleges against the assumptions which were generally made about this segment of higher education a decade ago. Dr. Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., in a book published in 1968 and entitled, This Is the Community College, stated that he was attempting to provide, for those who were interested, "an overview and some conclusions about the nature and potential of the community college in today's society." He indicated that the book focused on the kind of two-year institution which had experienced tremendous change and phenomenal growth during recent years and was now in the process of determining its future course -- the public community college.

Dr. Gleazer provided an overview which saw the community college as:

- A part of higher education in a state plan
- Receiving an increasing proportion of financial support from the state
- Established and operated under standards set at the state level
- Admitting all students who can benefit by a program
- Charging little or no tuition
- Having almost all students who commute
- Increasing the number and variety of technical and semi-professional programs
- Comprehensive in its programs
- Providing services to aid under-educated students of post high school age
- Looking to a state level junior college board for coordination of

planning, programs and services, and for state aid

- Represented in a state board or council for coordination with other institutions of higher education
- Having a separate and distinct district board, facilities and budget
- Locally initiated and controlled, with sufficient state participation to maintain standards

It is apparent in retrospect that Dr. Gleazer might have accepted promises as evidence of the status quo in many institutions at the time of his report was published in 1968. For example, a number of state plans had only recently been adopted and were far from implementation in 1968. Many of the state plans were laced with generalities which required subsequent explication. Within the following decade growing financial constraints would cause legislators and state boards to question whether the state had committed itself to provide the kinds of broad and comprehensive educational programs prescribed by the master plan. The concepts of comprehensiveness and accessibility are being challenged on pseudo-educational grounds due to scarce fiscal resources. One might ask, "Are we truly committed to maintaining a comprehensive range of educational offerings designed to serve all kinds of students, including those who are unprepared to pursue college-level studies without extensive remedial and/or developmental work when funds are scarce and we are required to set priorities and make decisions which affect students as well as staff members?"

The community colleges are described as receiving an increasing proportion of financial support from the state. It is probably true that the community colleges are receiving a greater proportion of their dollars from the state general funds. However, since the state in many instances has expanded its program of exemptions from local property tax levies and where referenda to raise local tax levies have failed while tuition and fees have been increased, the increase in proportion of state financial support may not reflect an increase in actual real dollars necessary to offset the impact of inflation.

Most community colleges were established and operated under standards set by the state in 1968 though colleges continued to be organized subsequent to publication of the report. What is remarkable is that the state standards which were in existence in 1968 have been expanded and elaborated upon many times over.

The community colleges were committed to admitting all students who could benefit by a program, charging little or no tuition, and having most students commute. Financial constraints have caused some colleges to restrict enrollments by curtailing program development. Tuition and fees are being assessed where previously no charge was made or increased from relatively low rates to a level where they equal or exceed tuition and fee charges assessed by public universities. Intricate student financial aid programs have been created to soften the impact of tuition increases on the disadvantaged. Because of application procedures these financial aid programs often do not enable needy students to qualify.

The threat of competition by community colleges to residential colleges has caused some state boards to adopt policies barring community colleges from building and operating dormitories even when dormitories might well be justified from an educational and/or demographic basis.

The number of technical and semi-professional programs has not continued to grow primarily due to fiscal constraints. In many cases colleges are faced with declining enrollments in baccalaureate programs where faculty are most heavily tenured. Even where retrenchment policies exist, seniority is frequently a key issue. Because of the way many community colleges evolved, with initial emphasis on baccalaureate programs, the faculty of these programs have seniority and thus must be retained even though the needs of students would be better served through a reallocation of resources to new technical and semi-professional programs for which there is a demand.

The comprehensiveness of community colleges is coming under increasingly

fierce attack as funding is in short supply. Where for years the comprehensive community college was regarded as the ultimate in educational concept from the standpoint of service to students, today the attack on this concept - though led by spokesmen from other sectors of higher education - is being joined by members of the community college faculty who see their interests threatened by continued emphasis upon comprehensiveness. Then there are the "community colleges" which failed to achieve comprehensiveness because of concern that involvement in some of the programs required to achieve comprehensiveness would somehow cause loss of prestige as a "collegiate" institution.

It is in the provision of services to aid under-educated students of post high school age that many institutions have struck their colors. In spite of well-defined commitments to foster services to the under-educated, who are frequently members of minority groups, institutions are increasingly finding reason to discontinue such services or to curtail them supposedly in the interest of "improving academic standards." The open door is slamming shut across the land as critics of the community college urge educators "to get back the basics of college education." Not only are the educationally disadvantaged being affected by this trend but, as indicated above, opportunities for occupational education are being curtailed.

There is no question but that community colleges are being forced to look to state-level boards for coordination of planning, programs and services, and for state aid. Many such boards are going far beyond coordination and are, in fact, heavily involved in regulation of almost every facet of college operation. The interests of local community colleges are not well represented in a state board or council for coordination with other institutions of higher education. Frequently, individuals who constitute the majority of the membership of such boards or councils do not understand the community college or are more sympathetic toward four year liberal arts colleges or universities with

which they identify or see the community colleges as a consumer of scarce resources which should be rightly allocated to the older and more traditional institutions which are serving "regular" (or traditional) college students. The staffs of such boards are frequently oriented toward so-called "senior" institutions because of their educational background and experience. It is not unusual to find the state board or council and its staff attempting to enlist the support of local board members for promises of greater "cost effectiveness" for the benefit of local and state taxpayers through implementation of state proposed guidelines.

Many community colleges have a separate and distinct district board, facilities and budget. However, because of expanded state control, many such local boards are seeing their authority eroded. Long awaited facilities go unbuilt because of financial constraints. Meanwhile, scarce capital construction dollars continue to be allocated for remodeling and/or replacement of facilities on public college and university campuses even though their enrollments have been stabilized for several years while community college enrollments have continued to expand in spite of inadequate facilities.

Many community college boards are finding that the privilege of having their own budget without being given the means to generate adequate resources to operate their college may be a mixed blessing. The concept of local initiative and control may be a hollow promise without funds necessary to implement district developed plans. All of this state control is justified on the premise that only the state is competent to create and maintain standards. This is a concept which permeates bureaucratic thinking even though there is little evidence to support the belief that bureaucrats are more competent, more dedicated, or have higher standards than those who provide leadership for the local community colleges.

Some Tentative Conclusions

It is apparent that the 1968 profile of the community college no longer fits

the community college of today -- if the earlier profile was, in fact, an accurate one. The community college of the 1970's has become a part of the state plan for regulatory purposes. There is little evidence to indicate, however, that it has been accepted as a peer by the other members of the higher education community even though it enrolls more students than four year colleges and universities of either the public sector or the private sector and almost as many as the two combined.

In the eyes of many of these peers, it is an interloper syphoning off scarce resources to accomplish tasks that are regarded as not really germane to higher education. The conclusion is that community colleges are not true institutions of higher education but rather are educational hucksters peddling whatever fad is popular with our customers at the moment. Some community college boards and presidents have become apologetic about their institutions; some have heeded the call to cast off the irrelevant tasks they are performing and become truly institutions of higher education, thus hopefully earning the approbation of their colleagues. What is not realized is that more and more of these colleagues are adopting the recourses and strategies of the community colleges to shore up sagging enrollments and to broaden their base of popular support.

What is also not realized is that leopards cannot change their spots and thus institutions which have traditionally shown little concern for the needs of the community, whatever its nature, probably will not be able to effectively serve the community. Nevertheless, there will be professions of care and concern by the senior institutions and there will be those community colleges which will, in their quest for love and respect from those who can never love or respect them, defile themselves by attempting to remove the spots which they wear. It is far better to clasp tightly the tenets that brought us into being. Perhaps our problem is that we have no such tenets but rather only a set of catch phrases set in neon light tubes which we turn on from time to

time to light up the sky and let people know we are still around. I do not believe that, but I do believe that our beliefs are being tested and are going to continue to be tested in a series of trials by ordeal.

The promise of a higher proportion of financial support from the state is an elusive will-o-the-wisp which, if followed blindly, will lead us over the cliff to destruction. This promise ignores the fundamental fact of political and economic reality. A higher proportion of something does not necessarily assure a greater amount of that something. The establishment of state standards does not assure a higher quality program. Adherence to state standards in no way guarantees adequate financing to accomplish accepted tasks. The Nebraska community colleges gave up state financing in order to be able to serve the needs of their communities. They concluded that adequate financial support could be generated from the community if its needs were being effectively met.

There has emerged within the past several years a renewal of the elitist philosophy which bodes ill for those who would adhere to a liberal egalitarian political posture. The community colleges are presently in the vanguard of this political element. In some areas of the country dire threats and subtle innuendos are causing college presidents and boards to re-examine their commitment to liberal egalitarianism. The elitists use economic factors to capture our attention but it soon becomes apparent that their concern for our financial well-being is merely a means to an end, the end being to force us to recant our commitment to create a better social order.

As our commitment to equal access to educational opportunity fades, so does our commitment to maintenance of the open door, low or no tuition, ancillary services to the under-educated students of post high school age, as well as comprehensiveness in our programs including education for technical and semi-professional positions.

As we tend to abandon our commitment to serving community needs, it becomes easier to accept the computer directed leadership of state boards and coordinating councils. Institutional integrity becomes lost in a morass of statewide planning which is not really planning for the facilitation of response to community needs but planning to satisfy the requirements of those who govern. Coordination is replaced by domination. Soon the institution which had held the promise of release for the many becomes an institution which lacks the ability to sustain its own sense of direction, let alone provide a sense of direction for those to whom it represented the only hope in an increasingly stultifying society. Unless those responsible for the leadership of community colleges recognize the dangers of acquiescing to outcomes which appear to be inevitable and embark upon a course designed to subvert these outcomes, one must conclude that the community college as we know it will give way to another type of institution which will be unrecognizable to us and to the students whom we have served.

Some Speculations Concerning the Future

What does the future hold for the community colleges as we enter the fourth quarter century of their existence? Probably the major constant in education for the next twenty-five years will be change. And this constant will have the most profound impact upon education and educators for as William Moore, Jr., whose book, Blind Man on a Freeway, deals with educational change and administrator reaction to it, stated in an address given at the University of Washington in February, 1970:

> It is not the rhetoric and villainies of war, poverty, crime, drugs, violence, racism, and their harvest of backlash, law and order, and repression; it is not the report that God is dead, the suppression of academic freedom, or even truth that educators fear. It is change.

Why should change create such problems for education and educators? The fundamental nature of education has been and continues to be to instill in youth an understanding and appreciation of the mores and heritage of society.

Education has always tended to focus upon past events rather than future prospects. How many institutions teach courses dealing with the future? This pattern may not change, but if it does not, we face serious problems in the years ahead. Increasingly we are being held accountable for what happens in our schools and colleges. We are also being held accountable for what does not happen! Translated into an action agenda, this means that we must have a clear idea of what we are trying to accomplish in order to be able to measure whether or not our objectives have been attained. Thus we can expect to have to define our educational objectives more precisely in the years ahead. We can anticipate the need for adaptation to meet needs which will change at an accelerated rate.

A concomitant of the pressure to adapt will be resistance to change by those whom change will impact in a negative way. We can expect fierce competition in the market place from all of the existing types of institutions as well as many new types of entities created for the purpose of providing education and training. This competition will persist so long as the states create funding mechanisms which force institutions to compete for students from a common pool which continually is shrinking in size.

A greater homogeneity will emerge in the nature of institutions of higher education with little apparent difference between the so-called private and the public. Senior institutions, both public and private, will develop programs designed to attract students from new constituencies. These programs will bear close resemblance to the community oriented programs offered by community colleges. While imitating the community colleges, the senior institutions will continue to chastize them for offering non-traditional programs catering to a non-college clientele. State control will increase for all types of institutions as they come to rely increasingly upon state financing. Community college faculty will be divided between those attempting to maintain the

status quo and those attempting to respond to the demand for change.

Clearly, the next quarter century will be a time of challenge for community college administrators. Perhaps more than any other group, they will have to change their administrative styles. Administrators will have to become creative managers of change with the requisite skills for such a role. It is safe to say that few community college administrators possess such skills today. As Richard C. Richardson, Jr., stated in an article which appeared in the March 1970 Junior College Journal:

> The question can legitimately be raised as to whether a science of administration may be said to exist with respect to two-year colleges. I would tend to feel from personal observation that current practice represents a hodgepodge of ideas garnered from business, secondary schools, and four-year universities without the benefit of much analysis as to how well these ideas relate to the kinds of problems currently being encountered by the administrative organizations of two-year colleges.

What we are not we must become! The charge is clear. The only questions are, "How many will accept the challenge? How many can adjust to the new demands? How many will want to make the effort? What will it take to make the task rewarding?"

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